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AUTHOR Sander, Wolfgang
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ABSTRACT

This document examines the state of political education in Germany since reunification. The study chronicles the history of political education in Germany. It argues for greater organization and for creation of standards for political education in German schools. The document offers goals for political education as a subject along with an organizational framework and training program for teachers. Contains a bibliography listing 49 items. (RJC)

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PD Dr. Wolfgang Sander
(University of Muenster)

ED 385 487

Strengthening Democracy through Political Education*

I.

In the past few years, many new democracies have risen in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. We all hope: these democracies will survive the coming years. The strengthening of these democratic governments is the primary goal of practical politics; schooling and education are only secondary. The German Comittee for Education, which has strongly influenced the development of the school system in Germany since 1955, stresses the close relationship between politics and education. A report in 1958 by the German Committee stated that, "educating youth politically is a precondition for effective politics. However, the political education of the populus occurs mainly through politics itself. Therefore, efforts towards political education will fail, if politicans are not aware of the educating effects which result from either positive or negative political actions". (Deutscher Ausschuß 1958 p.48; see Arbeitsgruppe 1994 p. 87ff and 178ff; Hoffmann 1991)

During the recent 75th anniversary of the passing of the Weimar Constitution, the president of the Federal Republic of Germany, Roman Herzog stressed the importance of courage for democrats in strengthening a young democracy. The Weimar Republic, according to Herzog, did not fail, "because of the lack of democracy, but rather because of the lack of reliable democrats". (R. Herzog 1994 p.743.)

There is no doubt that political education can partially advance democratic awareness. It is, however, unclear to what extent political education contributes to democratic awareness - especially in competition with the powerful electronic media.

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In order to make the tasks of political education in democratic states clear, people often make use of organic models. In German the term "Erziehung" (raising) linguistically supports this view. It stresses the belief that the strengthening of democratic awareness can be compared with the raising of plants; the plant has to have sufficient water, fertilizer and sun; and it also has to be protected from weeds. This metaphor - as nice as it may seem - conceals the fact that it **does not lead to any useful categories for the planning, analysis and organisation of teaching**.

The topic alone, as to what extent education for democracy is possible, is as old as European culture itself. Socrates angered his contemporaries with the question of how education for virtue might be accomplished. Since this topic was so explosive, and since most of his queries were of such an unconventional nature, the Athenians sentenced him to death . . . quite a price to pay.

I do not want to lecture you about philosophical basics, since I am sure all of you have some knowledge about them. However, I do think it is important to mention the works of Immanuel Kant, the famous philosopher from the city of Königsberg, who related enlightment to the development of reason. In my own dissertation entitled, "Efficiency and Emancipation" (Sander 1984), I tried to relate the legal models involved in reaching a verdict to political education. Today, however, I would like to look at the question of how democratic awareness can be supported by establishing political education as a subject in schools. I intend to do this with examples of actual problems occuring in the new East German Federal States.

II.

Political education in the former German Democratic Republic was both problematic in its contents and a complete failure, although enormous efforts were undertaken. Seldom has a government set up so many objectives, provided so much support and employed so many teachers as the former GDR. The GDR, incredibly enough, employed almost 50,000 more teachers in the 5 East German States than are employed

today. It is amazing, however, how little young people identified with the state. In the 1980's, Ilona Schneider (1992), a Eastgerman sociologist, detected in a comparative study of East German youth, **a decline in the legitimacy of the socialist system.**

The question as to why political education lacked effectiveness is, in my opinion, relatively easy to answer. The contents and methods, which were used in civic studies ("Staatsbürgerkunde"), led to a sort of "double thinking" and "double morality". All parts of society were put under state control which took the form of "soft Stalinism". The official environment of youth was incredibly "heteronomous, ordered and standardized. Young people who tried to break out of the 'norms', were in danger of being treated as criminals." (1992, p. 772). Students were expected to answer questions and solve problems according to an official manner which had very little to do with everyday life. Therefore, every citizen had to have two versions to every answer.

This fact can be demonstrated by means of a joke from the former GDR:
Question: How can you embarass an official of the SED (leading socialist party in the former GDR? Answer: Ask him for his opinion before he has had a chance to read **Das Neue Deutschland** (the party newspaper).

This experience makes it clear, that the state, in wanting to convert political education into a task for the public school system, has to limit itself. It does not correspond with the main notions of democracy, if the state wants to form loyal citizens with the help of political education. Young citizens are not educated for the government, but rather the government is expected to serve and be educated with regard to youth's needs (see Kuhn / Massing 1992; Rathenow / Richter 1993; Schiele / Schneider 1977 and 1987).

The other extreme, which is to abolish political education in public schools, should **not** be taken into consideration. This leads only to the disintegration of all political culture.(see Kowalsky 1993; Pabst / Schuster 1993; Zinser 1993; Feige 1993) School is still the only institution in our society which teaches systematic knowledge and basic abilities involving politics to all pupils regardless of race, creed and social background. (see Gagel 1994; Noll/Reuter 1993; Rüther 1993; Hoffman-Lange/Gille/Schneider 1993)

However, the internal policies of schools urgently need to be reformed. The well-known German educationalist, Hartmut von Hentig (1994), demands that students and teachers should not be restricted by policies and rules, but rather be able to present freely experiences and interests. The independent creative possibilities of the individual are to be expanded to include, for example, engagement in work-groups within the school. Education towards democracy in the public school system can only mean the creation of training and work facilities where youth, under the instruction of teachers, is given the chance to gather information concerning political issues, make responsible judgements, and present them in public (see Sander 1983 and 1994).

The strengthening of the competency involved in making judgements occurs on the basis of minimal consensus, to which the rules involved in fair conflict management belong, within the framework of human rights, the separation of powers, the rule of law, and solidarity with the impoverished.

The contributions of political education towards the strengthening of a young democracy, are the following:

a) to avoid the functionalisation of human beings by the state,

b) to avoid the desintegration of political culture as a result of the state's neglect of youth, and

c) to invest in the education of the abilities of the young generation to make political judgements.

In order to analyse this topic, I would like to deal with the curricular and organisational preconditions involved in establishing political education as a subject offered in the public school system. My prior knowledge and the limited amount of time unfortunately force me to limit myself to the former East German federal states. During the discussion, one might be able to draw a comparison to other countries facing the same problems. In addition, one might obtain some general insight as to how the strengthening of political awareness with the help of political education is possible.

School is an organised social system. (see Rolff 1993) As in every social system, the problems which are to be solved, are determined by three structural elements. They are: **Program, Organisation and Personnel**. These aspects may serve as a guide to define the position of political education in the new East German states.

III.

Programmatic Goals for Political Education as a Subject

Like the West German states of the Federal Republic, the new East German states retain independence from the federal government in matters concerning culture and education. Politics in schooling is the task of the 16 federal states themselves. (see Arbeitsgruppe 1994 p. 62ff) The federal government cannot interfere. They are very cautious when it comes to their responsibility and competence regarding these matters. In comparison with the centralized structure of the former GDR, responsiblity for school and education has been decentralized since unification. The striving for competence in developing guidelines for political education is one of the most important duties of education politics in the new federal states. In order to demonstrate this responsibility, the originality of the individual states is highly requested. Therefore, the new federal states in East Germany do not simply copy their West German counterparts, but rather prefer to show their independence through various modifications. As a consequence, we do not only have 11 varying guidelines from the old federal states in the West, we now have 5 additional ones. (see Mickel 1992a - d; Möbus 1992; Wettstädt 1992; similary in History see Schörken 1992) The relationships between them must also be taken into consideration. For example, for the 16 million people in the five new states there are 5 new sets of guidelines. For the old West German federal state of North Rhine Westphalia, with a population of 11 million, there is only one framing concept for political education.

The new federal states have fulfilled the task of developing their own guidelines for the subject "political education" in a very short time without encountering ideological confrontations. Four elements have assisted this development:

1) A sound pragmatism has positively influenced the work of the people involved with guideline development.

2) The times during which theorists of political education publically argued about the concepts of the subject, also seem to be over in the old Western federal states.

3) People in the new federal states would not have understood the problem, if theorists of political education would have still argued about concepts and ideologies.

4) In addition, the belief in the possibility of forming political attitudes and patterns of behavior with the help of schooling has greatly decreased. (After the curricular reforms have more or less come to an end, or, as critics say, have failed, a certain modesty concerning guidelines and curricular development has taken place when exploring the prospects of success. Complex goals are no longer strived for.) One is already satisfied with small changes in school and politics of everyday life. **Minimalism takes over.**

The plethora of guidelines allows itself to be made clear through the following contrast: A more conservative and affirmative approach (according to Mickel 1992a - c) is expressed in the guidelines of Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thüringia. Mickel demonstrates that:

- systematic facts and terminology (knowledge about institutions) are highlighted.
- the presentation of insights is more important than critical examiniation.
- the orientation towards political problems and their solution is neglected.
- the tensions between constitutional norms and reality are not didactically utilized.
- discussion of the most recent past of the GDR is neglected.
- social conflicts are not dealt with.
- a balanced relationship between civil rights and duties is especially emphasized.
- a tendency towards an "unpolitical political education" is evident.

Concerning curricular gradation of subject areas in grades 7 through 10, pupils are first confronted with problems drawn from their daily experiences. Only later do they deal with political questions more removed from daily life. In grade 7, topics such as family,

leisure time, school, community politics, environmental protection, European and international politics are discussed. In grade 8, themes such as school, youth, leisure time and media consumption appear on the learning agenda. Grade 9 deals with basic human rights, the rule of law, communal election politics, the separation of power and political parties. Grade 10 concentrates on democracies, parliament, Europe, peace and security politics and relations between industrial and developing nations.

A more progressive, social-liberal approach towards political education is to be found in the guidelines of the East German Federal State of Brandenburg regarding the following points:

- The main task of political education is described as supporting the development of mature and politically aware citiziens. The explicit goal of political learning, as explained in the guidelines, is "liberation from immaturity. This is to be understood as a learning process, in which pupils learn to understand the evermore complex and difficult world, so that they no longer blindly accept given circumstances. On the basis of knowledge and the ability to judge situations, they gain the ability to practice self-determination and cooperation in politics and society." (Minister für Bildung, Jugend und Sport 1991: Guidelines, p.5)

- Orientation towards problems and their solution is most important for the didactical planning of teaching. (see Henkenborg / Sander 1993)

- There is no other federal state, in which confrontation with everyday life and youth's own experiences (especially in the former GDR) is made a topic of discussion in the class. (see Strohmeier 1993; Sturzebecher / Dietrich 1993; Georg 1993)

We can conclude that we do not find the opinion expressed in any of the state guidelines that political education can and should construct democracy. Minimal goals determine this. In spite of these clear borderlines and some differences in content, all guidelines are focused on one goal: Political education still has to contribute to the development of political awareness of youth.

Finally a short remark, as to why these guidelines are primarily so important. They have impact on:

- the planning and implementation of the lesson,
- the devolopment of text books and permission to use them,
- the formation of internal lesson plans,
- subject-orientated discussion processes among didactical theorists, heads of department and in teacher training programs and
- the development of a "Metasprache", in order to be able to communicate within the school and between the school and the public.

IV.

Realisation of an Organisational Framework for the Subject Political Education

Certainly, the guidelines are of great importance for the establishment of political education in schools in the federal states. They express the explicit political will of each secretary of culture and education. Decisions of an organisational type are even more important than the guidelines for the factual implementation of the lesson. They determine the positioning of the subject in the school schedule. Therefore the decision, as to whether political education is regarded as a subject in itself, with an appropriate amount of lesson hours, is of strategic importance. This is easy to understand, if one looks at the fact that it is possible to set up guidelines for political education without changing the school schedule. For example, if political education becomes a general principle of teaching important for all subjects but no one is explicitly responsible for it, nothing happens. Even if the guidelines are generelly regarded as carefully constructed, **it is an illusion to believe this alone is enough**. (generally see Bernfeld 1975, p. 92ff)

Therefore, it is important for the strengthening of political education in schools, that the expenditure for the development of guidelines is limited and that financial, personnel and organisational resources are especially deployed in areas in which the subject is

given an appropriate position in relation to other subjects in the lesson plan.

What does an "appropriate position" of the subject mean? From the old federal states, we know that the questions concerning the school schedule can be answered in various ways. In the federal states of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Palatinate, Lower-Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein, civic studies ("Sozialkunde") is regarded as a matter of peripheral importance.

In the federal states of Hessen and North-Rhine Westphalia, the number of lesson hours has reached a remarkable level. I would like to use North-Rhine Westphalia as an example for demonstrating this. In the various types of secondary schools (Realschule, Gymnasium, Gesamtschule) the subject consists of 1 hour per week in grade 5, and of two hours in grades 6,8 and 10. The subject is taught in exchange with history and geography.

If we take a look at statistics, in order to clarify to what extent political education is really taught in schools, we have to recognize that political education is often either not taught at all, or taught by unqualified teachers (teachers who received their training in other subjects). (s. picture 1: Civic Studies in NRW) In view of this enormous lack of "normal" lesson hours, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the subject political education is a rare thing in North-Rhine Westphalia. (see Olberg 1994) Although this has been known for years, nothing has been done to abolish this state of affairs. In the wake of budget restrictions, which have also taken place here in your country, only gaps in the teaching of the most important subjects (German, Math, English) are filled.

This is obvious when we look at the hiring of new teachers. From the 1400 newly hired teachers in 1994, only 137 had qualifications to teach political education. (see Landtag von Nordrhein-Westfalen 1994)

As a result, I would like to point out that the targeted goals in the old federal states differ in extent and precision. If one looks at the reality of school schedules, one becomes aware of a substantial lack of institutionalized political education in federal states with precisely formulated targeted goals. One can therefore assume that in federal states with less precisely targeted goals, the deficit is even greater.

On the other hand, if one looks at the situation in the new federal states, one has to notice a similar careless establishment of the subject in the lesson schedules. Here too, the subject is also a matter of peripheral importance. Only in Brandenburg (partner state of North-Rhine Westphalia) similar targeted goals are set. Up to this point, it does not make sense to speculate as to whether it will be possible to make the targeted goals a reality, because qualified teachers are simply not available in the next time period of 4 years. In view of this situation, it is better to ask whether or not political education lessons are taught at all. Most teachers who taught civic studies in the former GDR are now regarded as ideologically handicapped. In addition, many people view them as unreliable, due to their close connections to the STASI (Former East German Secret Police). It is easy to understand why those people were not asked to educate pupils towards democracy.

A radical separation from old traditions occurred. This decision not only seems to be proper and substantial from the western perspective, but also carries the entire affirmation of politicians, teachers, parents, and pupils in the new federal states.

However, the ideological functionalisation of civic studies in the former GDR and the personnel-insecurity affect the establishment of the new subject political education in the consciousness of the teachers, principals and parents in a negative manner. Currently, principals, teachers, parents and pupils are willing to accept the provisional arrangements by which the subject is taught by teachers who have been trained in other subjects. However, the people involved with political education will no

longer accept this after the initial euphoria of reunification is over.

Let me suggest the following thesis: In the light of the experience of how unseriously the subject of political education is dealt with in the western federal states, one must fear that the provisional arrangements will not be brought to an end and that the subject of political education, which was so enthusiastically welcomed during the reunification period, will be neglected.

For the future development of political education in the schools of the new federal states it is very important that a) the lack of political education is not obscured by unclear lesson plans and responsibilities; b) this lack is filled by massive investments in educating teachers; c) all efforts to abolish the lack of teachers through the cancelation of the subject or through a reduction of didactic demands are stopped from the very beginning.

In this period of transition, the subject either succeeds or fails with the cooperation of teachers, principals and parents. Heads of departments, didactic theorists, as well as political scientists are able to stress the necessity of political education through targeted public relation strategies. Only if this happens, will the Ministry of Education and educational politicians invest in this area.

V.

Personnel Training

After the fall of the east German communist regime, all civic studies teachers followed the rule not to teach political education within in the transition phase leading to reunification. They were quite often working as extended servants of the STASI in the schools and were therefore often shunned by their colleagues, even if they tried to make the best out the difficult situation and did not report ideological deviants to the STASI.

During the transitional period, the subject of political education was taken over by very

active teachers, who were especially trusted by pupils, parents and colleagues. They had been trainend as teachers of various subjects such as sports, geography, physics, mathematics, etc.

A disadvantage of this practice becomes very evident: special training as a political or social scientist was non-existent.

In order to be able to clarify the framework of the subject in everyday school life, it is necessary to develop special political science training for those teachers involved in teaching the subject. Therefore, the decision that professional training be offered for teachers already working, was of great importance during the transition period in order to be able to create the necessary personnel infrastructure.

The advantages of this move are obvious: Teachers stay in school and have continous contact with their pupils. In the course of their training, they also have contact with teachers who also teaching political education and therefore gain special insights into the problems within the subject. The end product is that the loss of school lessons remains minimal. Teachers, in return, continue to receive the same salary. The disadvantage of this move mainly consists in an enormous amount of time teachers have to invest in this training in addition to the lessons they already teach.

One must also take into consideration that these teachers are no longer young; it therefore takes longer to get accustomed to teaching another subject.

In addition, the trainers are almost always from the Western federal states, and they are unfamiliar with the situation in the East. In the beginning, teachers in the Eastern federal states were rather open to this support from the West. However, in time, they have distanced themselves and tend to feel rather inferior to those from the West. Communication and cooperation between East and West has become increasingly difficult. Unpleasant side effects have dampened efforts to qualify teachers. Some western trainers have taken advantage of the situation for financial reasons. For example, trainers from the west sometimes earned more money in one day, than the

people they were teached would have earned in an entire month! Occurences of this kind surely do not contribute to an improvement of the working climate.

In the federal state of Brandenburg, training of political education teachers seems to have been rather successful despite of a few difficulties during its initiation. (see von Olberg / Priebe / Wenzel 1994; von Olberg / Priebe 1995; Rovó 1994; Patzelt 1994) I will now discuss three main reasons for this:

1) Berlin and its universities are easily accessible. Therefore, it was possible to invite a significant number of university instructors for such training measures.

2) The clear decision of the state secretary for education to establish the subject of political education in schools and to give priority to "on-the-job" training to future political education teachers has contributed to the development of political education as a subject.

3) Didactical, curricular, organisational and personnel support by the North-Rhine Westphalian Institute for Schooling and Education has set up important contacts with experienced teachers working in North-Rhine Westphalia. The compact application-oriented introduction to the didactics of political education was exactly what teachers needed in the new Federal State of Brandenburg.

The strain on teachers in the new federal states is not to be overlooked. If there is no success in abolishing some of the negative aspects, political education will have no chance of survival. I would now like to point out some of these negative aspects:

- Teachers are always in fear of being laid off. For example, in Brandenburg, there are 31000 teachers for only 26000 available posts.
- There is a significant difference of salary between teachers in the East and West.

- Examinations taken by teachers in the former GDR are now not always accepted in the West.
- Teachers who started their careers during the former GDR years, are often stereotyped as the remnants of a totalitarian regime and as the "losers" in the process of German unity, although many of them participated in the "peaceful revolution"..
- Teachers in the Eastern states are often told what they should and should not do by officials of the ministry of education and western teaching "specialists". The consequence of this "big-brother" relationship tends to lead to an increased frustration among the teachers.

During the transition period, which is still going on, it will be essential to maintain the reform potential among teachers. In the present situation, the aspect of personnel development is to be viewed as playing a key role for the establishment of political education as a subject in schools.

I have been informed by colleagues, that the biographical processing of the collapse of the system is of special importance to participants both from the East and the West. This is the only manner in which this "winner-loser" syndrome can be overcome so that east and west can work together as colleagues in order to establish political education as a subject in schools throughout Germany.

In light of the enormous structural difficulties of political education in East Germany, Walter Gagel (1994), one of the leading didactical theorists, pleads for an adoption of the Western model of political education. The difficulties in the initiation period, according to Gagel, are only to overcome if the already available concepts from the West are also used in the East.

I do not agree with this kind of normative justification of an orientation towards the Western model. A principal openness for autonomous developments would certainly be a better basis in order to motivate the very few people who care about political education in the new federal states.

The alternative is to be seen in the advancement of local training programs. Experienced local trainers have to set up a cooperation network, so that political education teachers can share their experiences periodically. These trainers have to be

supported through a reduction of lesson hours and a permanent dialogue with collegues from the West. In my opinion, this is a good basis to realize a certain continuity of polictical education despite of the disadvantageous preconditions. In addition, a pressure group is formed, which will struggle for an improvement of the infrastructures for the subject political education.

Summary

The initial euphoria after unification has led to the establishment of political education as a subject in schools in the five new federal states. However, the status of the subject is currently more than uncertain.

The programmatic guidelines require political education on very high level. They reflect the Western concepts of political education. Original elements from the new federal states cannot yet be found.

Looking at the organisational implementation in schools, you can notice that political education is still a matter of peripheral importance in four out of five new federal states.

Personnel insecurity of political education is still very problematic. Only in the state of Brandenburg a training program has been started that might be able to contribute to a local establishment of political education.

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Adress
PD Dr. Wolfgang Sander
Fachbereich Erziehungswissenschaft
Universität Münster

D-48143 Münster
Georgskommende 33

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